



Fall 2022

Specimens and Reflections - Poetry

Fairfield University Art Museum

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.fairfield.edu/specimens-and-reflections-ephemera>

This item has been accepted for inclusion in DigitalCommons@Fairfield by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Fairfield. It is brought to you by DigitalCommons@Fairfield with permission from the rights-holder(s) and is protected by copyright and/or related rights. **You are free to use this item in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses, you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.** For more information, please contact digitalcommons@fairfield.edu.

Where the gods gathered

A
great
yawning

O

an open oculus	over our heads
an outlet to cool	this ornate space
an arena of proud	vistas of clouds
a sungold rim	of concentric circles
built of square	coffers overcrowded
so old Olympians	can still spy on us
giving this Pantheon of nameless ones	
a god's eye view	

as we look up into an overarching
bowl of light in this half-hemisphere --
temple and tomb as Lord Byron wrote:
From Jove to Jesus with its offsetting
circular sightlines that are overseeing
this spacious semi sphere as loosely
each word's first letter mirrors that opening
as a visual onomatopoeic reference
obliging us now to re-orient ourselves
to our own origins of calloused hands
pouring this mass of oozing concrete
as an outward ordering of this dome
an offering to honor obscure gods called
omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient ones
now observed with saints, artists, oligarchs
as the orifice over us says:
This is eternity
So that my outcast sense of myself obscures.

Attend to Wisdom

I hear beauty speaking to me
as it spoke boldly long ago in ways
before being here I could understand.

Euclid is invoked more than angels,
pure intellects not here, that would call
me to fly up, to fly beyond them.

Here geometry is the whole substance
of all things, subtle and permanent
divinity inscribed in its perspective.

From the computed visible to the invisible
its light is a ladder in gold and white,
secure in the perfect geometry of itself.

Focused on eternity outside of history,
I am offered Pythagorean truth,
untouched but by the syntax of the unsaid.

Defamiliarized roundels and odd oblongs --
not a simplified analog to the human --
are a haven for a god of the mathematicians.

Marble mountains where deities once lived
were torn down, and the dressed stone is
still filled with whatever once dazzled.

Hands clutching a chain of lifted cell phones
freeze the carved oak and acanthus capitals
that have crafted an elegy in unyielding stone.

To this cloud of unknowing I can not close
my fixed eyes to the darkness of doubt
to be lost in the greater darkness of faith.

Holy Lady startle with immortal fire WH Auden

My unrepentant imagination
of latin elegists and artists
led me around these toppled stone
bridges, remnants of ancient pillage,
not daring to avert my eyes from the river,
or its residue of glistening fish,
on this sticky night in mid-summer.
The chronic unhappiness I felt,
that liberal itch to be loved singly,
was slowly anesthetized by drink --
glass after glass of cloudy grappa.
Nearby the church of the saint of music
echoed from our roaring songs.
The girl martyr, copied in marble,
slept, despite our unbearable sounds --
strands of her hair set in stone --
the darkened image of life and death.
The crypt was like an open black blossom.
I could not see the source of reddening
light on these pavilions over a martyr,
a fire etching the columns and flooring
I dumbly gazed as the painted faces
stare right back reflected in ancient eyes,
unblinking , with a thousand yard look.
This photograph writes darkness in light,
a stone still-life fixed by a digital knife,
yet still life that my world had never seen,
as my eyes shutter open from waking sleep.
I brought you here, where each kiss is
a concise sermon, and love is transgressive,
our embraces rubbing holiness from our skin
amidst this deep conspiracy of saintly bones.
O Cecilia, listen to the music of the spheres.
But I heard only music from nearby tavernas,
and instead of angel wings, mine were tattered.

Finding the Black Madonna

This altered image forms an arc
in a golden lacquer
in this Roman Montserrat
exalting Spanish piety.
In the ceiling glowing diamond
shapes surrounding octagons
are framed with victor's wreaths
and ribbons on gold fields
fulfilling spaced triangles
where windows open.
The dome is lifted high
by the Gospel writers
who give it radiating strength...
A reminder nothing passes --
pagan herms are placed
around a central oval
with a central Christ in glory
adored by cherub faces.
Rich, polychromed materials
emphasize and ring the
arches' symbols of the Virgin,
while on the tympanum
the Father looks on us.
Here the Borgia pope
rests among the modern
kings of Catholic Spain.
The imposing painted cross
at the high altar finishes
where the arc of gold has led,
an altar privileged for prayer
But hidden from our seeing
are decorated chapel altars.
One where James the Great,
cause of the long Camino,
poses like his brother Christ
with a sash of pilgrim shells.
And nearby is a chapel where
the Black Madonna occupies
a golden throne, and she herself
the throne of wisdom where
her dark-skinned son is shown.
We recall the lyric verses
from the stirring Song of Songs:
"I am black and beautiful",
needed now when Black Lives Matter.

From the Arno to the Tiber

Here John the Baptist
the protector of Florence
is the patron named.

A Medici pope
sanctioned its latin cross shape
but lost Raphael.

From that grand city
proud of its art and culture
Dante was exiled.

An epidemic
of plague and sweating sickness
prompted this vast church

and a hospital
and hostel for Florentines,
largesse from bankers.

The ceiling is bare,
a monochrome barrel vault.
Chapels hide the art.

Borromini lies
here, a suicide, who built
much of Baroque Rome.

Did he, as I do,
search maps for sanctuary
that may not exist?

From the oculus
a dove floats in the light-gray
and white cupola.

Will wisdom be shared,
if paradise speaks through art
so geometric?
Beyond my blurred sight
letters shaped like seraphim

are written in flames.

The Baptist's preaching
spreads into infinity
an alien voice.

What sacred words meant
has been scattered on the ground --
footprints scorched with blood.

So who is now called,,
known in broken syllables
while thunder listens?

What is real we know
is all around us if we
would only see it.

We could abolish
the divide of visible
and invisible.

Rectangular piers
are painted here to appear
as gray-veined marble.

This artistic trick
clues us to transfer our gaze
to find secret shapes.

As I still struggle
my terror from pure light shows
what will burn away.

Questions in a Jesuit Shrine

Into this place as if a garden
I come again in reverence
for the deceased men of God
in this grid of memorial tombs.

It is a Counter-Reformation opera
in scenes of prison, rope, and torture,
with martyrs in dramatic martyrdom.
Here are black-robos known as Ours.

At the close of the last day will they
like us want to see our own bodies
in another, surprising form, whatever
being glorified can even mean?

Now within our noisy carnival
of dread do they all still weep
as we often do sleeping fitfully
with the poetry of these markers?

They taught us the meaning
of the soul is the soul itself,
and the turning womb of these,
our graves, prepares a breech birth.

When the angel musician blows
a golden horn, and in a terrible
twinking graves open up like
missile silos eyeing the last sky

above these narrow holding cells
before moving to the main arena
where the wily lions have had
all their piercing teeth removed,

we learn the true task of the dead
is to make new again what we once
thought as only our ordinary rounds
but now to join in a live performance.

Will each of us think in that new light
it resembles a vast wedding breakfast,
where we will serve other guests easily,
freed from sorrow in this vale of tears?

A Spiritual Exercise

Anima Christi, the words that the soul of Loyola embraced in his life and his most fervent prayers, still enlivens Santissimo Nome di Gesu.

The nave of the church is as dark as the world where we stumble and battle with sickness and death, as the Christogram shield shows a star-burst of bronze.

I am trying to write without traces of natural light for my mind and my soul, in a theatre of questions and pain. Then why do I feel even now a resurgence of fire?

Angels the color of cumulus clouds are the frame: this resplendent trompe-l'oeil of heaven that stretches with brushstrokes of shadows that glaze the polychrome marble.

Their wingspans are floating and filling the spaces we know are now empty of time, with ambiguous borders, the solid or painted, a stagecraft that blurs both the holy and human.

Mirrors are tilted to help me imagine within the high ceiling as my eyes have been opened for peering inside of a window of heaven, transporting me up or paradise close to a suffering world.

The methods they used for effects were liturgical music, baroque and majestic, as the Tridentine Church stood triumphant, worshiping models of martyrs, to answer by doubting beliefs.

Using illusion, a hidden mechanics with engineered pulleys and cables, a deus ex machina wooden device, letting the saint appear for the wonder of pilgrims and tourists as night hastens on.

The heel of Religion has crushed every head of the heretic band; yet these triumphs conflict with the heart formed in love from deep in creation that bursts into being, proclaiming: Gesu !

No exit exists that we know to escape from the terrors of life or from seeing in ecstasy's face what can seem so disturbing. If only I found in my life, not my words, how to utter the ultimate Word.